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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR AND WHA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CU](#) [NL](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/EU/CUBA: DUTCH TALK THE TALK, BUT
STILL LOOK FOR EU UNITY

REF: BRUSSELS 4080

Classified By: POL Counselor Andrew Schofer for Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

1. (C) Summary: Cuba's refusal to allow entry to two Dutch MPs and one Spanish MP on October 15 focused public attention sharply on Cuba's human rights record and the EU's Cuba's policies, with many MP's weighing in in favor of a stronger EU approach. FM Bot called in the Cuban Ambassador to complain about the incident, and an MFA spokesman called for a more "effective" EU approach to human rights in Cuba. In their national capacity, the Dutch position is that the tough EU restrictions imposed after the March 2003 crackdown should remain in place; as EU president, however, the Dutch are limited by their desire to maintain EU unity. If other states -- e.g. Spain -- build momentum for "softening" the EU's Cuba policy, the Dutch will not break consensus. End Summary.

Dutch Furious about MPs Denied Entry to Cuba

2. (U) FM Bot summoned the Cuban Ambassador on October 18 to demand an explanation of Cuba's decision to deny entry to three MPs (two Dutch, one Spanish) on October 15. (The pre-arranged trip was organized by a local NGO to commemorate the "Remolcador" tragedy and included meetings with prominent dissidents.) After the meeting, Bot's spokesman characterized the Cuban Ambassador's explanation -- that the MPs had traveled on tourist passports "inappropriately" -- as "unacceptable" and stressed that the Dutch would seek an EU policy "most effective in bringing about change in the human rights situation in Cuba." The story of the parliamentarians' aborted journey gripped the Dutch media for days, with Dutch newspapers running op-eds by the MPs highlighting the plight of dissidents in Cuba and calling for tougher EU measures to induce Cuba to respect human rights. Spanish-driven efforts to develop closer relations with the Cuban government (perceived as being at the expense of Cuban dissidents) were characterized as "totally unacceptable."

3. (C) In a meeting on October 21 with Poloff, Jan Jaap Groenemeijer, MFA Cuba policy advisor in the Office of Western Hemispheric Affairs, said that Cuba clearly wants the EU to sever contact with dissidents. During his meeting with Bot, the Cuban Ambassador reportedly referred to dissidents as "mercenaries" and argued that Europeans should not meet with them. Recalling the Cuban Ambassador's explanation for denying entry to the MPs, Groenemeijer commented wryly this could create the "false impression" that Cuba might ever issue a visa expressly for the purpose of meeting dissidents. Groenemeijer added that Spanish MP Maragas had earlier called for the recall of Spain's ambassador in Havana after the latter had suggested publicly that the EU should stop inviting dissidents to national day receptions, and surmised that this might be one reason for the Cuban decision. (Groenemeijer noted with concern that the Spanish Ambassador's statement contradicted EU policy but appeared to be in line with Spanish efforts to change it.)

Revision of EU Policy?

4. (C) Groenemeijer confirmed that the Dutch want to maintain a hard line on Cuba, particularly after the snub from Havana. Solo Spanish efforts to soften EU policy might not succeed, he suggested, but he cited a recent EL PAIS article in which Spanish FM Moratinos claims to have the support of both London and Paris for a softer approach. Groenemeijer argued that the Dutch remained resolute that Cuba must improve the human rights situation before the EU could return to the pre-2003 "constructive engagement." As EU President, however, the top priority for the Dutch is to maintain EU unity. He deplored a split in EU policy as "the best present to give Cuba," and said the Dutch "would do anything to prevent it." Groenemeijer stressed that Spain alone could not turn the EU onto a more lenient course with Cuba, but if it finds allies it certainly could build momentum in that direction. Groenemeijer confirmed that Cuba will be on the agenda November 16 at the EU's next Latin America working party meeting (COLAT). (It had been on the October agenda but COLAT referred it back to EU Heads of Mission in Havana for recommendations.)

15. (C) On October 22, Wouter Plomp, deputy director of the MFA's Human Rights office, told POLOFF he was "not aware of any efforts to soften the EU policy on Cuba." Separately, Aleid Bos, HR officer covering Latin America in the same office, "noted U.S. concerns" with regard to a possible shift in the EU's approach to Cuba but said that "that is all I can say for now." (Note: Both Plomp and Bos confirmed that Groenemeijer's office has the lead on Cuba policy within the Dutch MFA, although they frequently provide input with regard to human rights.)

COMMENT

16. (C) While the publicity generated by the MP incident has hardened domestic Dutch opposition against a softer line on Cuba, the Dutch -- as EU president -- will not stand in the way of a developing EU consensus driven by a determined member state. As the Cuba debate within the EU progresses, it will be important for the Dutch to hear strong voices opposing a change to enable them to declare that such consensus does not exist.
SOBEL